

Economic Policy

tion, not one of rectifying the problems. Worse still, judging from the utterances of the leader of the Liberal Party, it is we who should conform to a lagging economy, not that the economy should be made more vibrant and prosperous to serve the people better. We Canadians are being conditioned to accept a standard of living less than our capability. It is a subtle conditioning, but it is there.

With no real growth in the economy, a per capita income now eighth in the world compared with second six years ago, and with the highest combined inflation and unemployment levels since Confederation, those in power would like to talk of other things. The new approach is: if you cannot reach your goals, then change your goals.

We are now told there is a limit to growth in Canada. The Prime Minister's control program is designed to whip us into line. Our Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) advises that we should use more powdered milk, for example, to offset the rising price of the fresh stuff. Our Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) adds that we are eating too much meat and should shift to cheaper spaghetti and macaroni. Our expectations are said to be too high, and our natural resources are now found to be finite.

But to live is to grow, and as we lower our expectations so will we lower our achievements. Certain resources may be finite, but man's ingenuity is infinite. Canada, with its relatively small population and vast area, is unique in the world. We have the potential to be the wealthiest people on earth if we allow our resources to be harnessed through individual initiative.

To prosper, a nation needs fresh water, food, resources, energy and an educated population. We have them all. Canada has more lakes than the rest of the world combined, and about one third of the world's fresh water supply. In relation to our population we have more arable farm land, natural resources, and energy reserves than any other country. We certainly have a highly talented people. So why have we slipped? In my opinion we have slipped as we have subjected ourselves to undue bureaucratic control. Our growth in employment has been more in the unproductive sectors of the economy than the productive.

Most bureaucrats are quick to regulate, but slow to innovate. Left to government, our oilfields, our gas reserves and our potash industry would never have been developed to their present levels. Yet governments, in the name of progress, now stifle further advances through heavy taxation and regulation, and there are even plans to nationalize certain of our industries.

The greatest thing government could do is to stop expanding and to be explicit as to the future for those who wish to innovate and create. The people of Canada can create a vibrant economy once again, but government cannot do it for them. Such an economy would create jobs for Canadians in productive sectors. What a relief that approach would be compared with the present drift. But the worst may be yet to come.

Recently I was shown a paper which is now being reviewed by the Liberal caucus. It contemplates the substitution of a new, and I quote, "gross social product" index for the present gross national product figures. In future it is suggested that we calculate the contribution of the unemployed in our society, not just the employed. When

[Mr. Stevens.]

we visit our neighbour it is suggested that that should be recorded in the new scale as a contribution to Canada. And of course, when we take a holiday, that in turn should be duly recorded as a plus for the nation. It is strange what some academic, bureaucratic and so-called liberal minds will turn to. It is even stranger that they are paid for their efforts out of our taxes. Canada was not built with such thinking, nor will such thinking help in the building of our future.

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The nation has now reached a crossroads where we must decide between a more competitive, more open society or accept, perhaps irrevocably, a society in which the large decisions about our economic and personal welfare are made by a central government.

The past demonstrates that a system of free enterprise, despite its many flaws, is the most compatible with the protection of rights and liberties, as well as the most productive of material goods. Equally so, recent history shows that government, despite its splendid intentions, is incapable of matching the vitality, the wisdom, and the ingenuity of free men. Let us hope the present administration learns this simple truth soon. If it does confidence will return and we will have significantly less inflation and unemployment, with a higher real growth for all to share.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, I am glad we are not having a vote on this particular motion. While I agree with the content of the motion to the effect that the government does not know what it is doing, etc., the remarks I have just heard do not persuade me that the alternative is any better.

I think I have heard that speech before. It seems to me it was given in the late sixties or early seventies when the Liberal rump sat on this side of the House. This is the sort of criticism the Conservatives were making of the then government whose dollar had gone away up, a government that was in the grip of a high interest rate policy from the Bank of Canada, and was following a contradictory policy in that the monetary expansion was coupled with an easy fiscal policy. "Everything changes and yet nothing changes."

The subject matter of the motion is a very important and serious one, however, and should command our attention. This party has been formally committed to the idea of planning. I wish I had the same kind of faith that the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) has in the free enterprise system and its ability to do all the right things to get our economy going.

We do not very often get examples of the problems with the free enterprise system because newspapers and critics generally, certainly the financial writers, love to point out that the waste that takes place in our society is almost entirely government waste. Their annual horror story is the Auditor General's report. More copy comes out of that when writers point out with glee all the errors committed by the government.

It is not very often that we read about the things that happen in the private sector and learn how costly they can